
Couriers and Messengers

(0*NET 43-5021.00)

Nature of the Work

Couriers and messengers move and distribute information, documents, and small packages for businesses, institutions, and government agencies. They pick up and deliver letters, important business documents, or packages that need to be sent or received quickly within a local area. Trucks and vans are used for larger deliveries, such as legal caseloads and conference materials. By sending an item by courier or messenger, the sender ensures that it reaches its destination the same day or even within the hour. Couriers and messengers also deliver items that the sender is unwilling to entrust to other means of delivery, such as important legal or financial documents, passports, airline tickets, or medical samples to be tested.

Couriers and messengers receive their instructions either in person—by reporting to their office—or by telephone, two-way radio, or wireless data service. Then they pick up the item and carry it to its destination. After each pickup or delivery, they check in with their dispatcher to receive instructions. Sometimes the dispatcher will contact them while they are between stops, and they may be routed to go past a stop that recently called in a delivery. Because most couriers and messengers work on commission, they are carrying more than one package at any given time of the day. Consequently, most couriers and messengers spend much of their time outdoors or in their vehicle. They usually maintain records of deliveries and often obtain signatures from the persons receiving the items.

Most couriers and messengers deliver items within a limited geographic area, such as a city or metropolitan area. Items that need to go longer distances usually are sent by mail or by an overnight delivery service. Some couriers and messengers carry items only for their employer, which typically might be a law firm, bank, or financial institution. Others may act as part of an organization's internal mail system and carry items mainly within the organization's buildings or entirely within one building. Many couriers and messengers work for messenger or courier services; for a fee, they pick up items from anyone and deliver them to specified destinations within a local area. Most are paid on a commission basis.

Couriers and messengers reach their destination by several methods. Many drive vans or cars or ride motorcycles. A few travel by foot, especially in urban areas or when making deliveries nearby. In congested urban areas, messengers often use bicycles to make deliveries. Bicycle messengers usually are employed by messenger or courier services. Although e-mail and fax machines can deliver information faster than couriers and messengers can, and although a great deal of information is available over the Internet, an electronic copy cannot substitute for the original document in many types of business transactions.

Employment

Couriers and messengers together held about 132,000 jobs in 2002. Approximately 28 percent were employed in the couriers and messengers industry. About 13 percent worked in health-care services, and around 9 percent worked in the legal services industry. Another 8 percent were employed in finance and insurance firms. Technically, many messengers are self-employed independent contractors, because they provide their own vehicles and, to a certain extent, set their own schedules. In many respects, however, they are like employees, because they usually work for one company.



Most couriers and messengers deliver items within a limited geographic area, such as a city or metropolitan area.

Job Outlook

Employment of couriers and messengers is expected to grow more slowly than average through 2012, despite an increasing volume of parcels, business documents, promotional materials, and other written information that must be handled and delivered as the economy expands. However, some jobs will arise out of the need to replace couriers and messengers who leave the occupation.

Employment of couriers and messengers will continue to be adversely affected by the more widespread use of electronic information-handling technology, such as e-mail and fax. Many documents, forms, and other materials that people used to have delivered by hand are now downloaded from the Internet. Many legal and financial documents, which used to be delivered by hand because they required a handwritten signature, can now be delivered electronically with online signatures. However, couriers and messengers still will be needed to transport materials that cannot be sent electronically—such as blueprints and other oversized materials, securities, and passports. Also, they still will be required by medical and dental laboratories to pick up and deliver medical samples, specimens, and other materials.

Related Occupations

Messengers and couriers deliver letters, parcels, and other items. They also keep accurate records of their work. Others who do similar work are Postal Service workers; truck drivers and driver/sales workers; shipping, receiving, and traffic clerks; and cargo and freight agents.

Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service. Persons interested in courier and messenger jobs also may contact messenger and courier services, mail-order firms, banks, printing and publishing firms, utility companies, retail stores, or other large companies.

(See the introduction to the section on material-recording, -scheduling, -dispatching, and -distributing occupations for information on working conditions, training requirements, and earnings.)